CHAPTER 1

WHY THIS BOOK?

This book originated as an action-research project conducted between 1992 and 1994 under the auspices of the California Board of Behavioral Sciences when I was a postgraduate student enrolled in the Masters of Arts degree program in the area of Marriage, Family and Child Counseling and Human Development at Pacific Oaks College in Pasadena. Unbeknown to me at the time, my study was to be a type of research analogous to what Jungian scholar Robert Romanyshyn will have called more than a decade later “research with soul in mind” (Romanyshyn, 2007). Yet back then in 1992 I was not only ten years away from the subject matter of my future doctorate in the area of philosophy of education and cultural studies, but also quite undecided on the topic of my Masters thesis that was eventually to be called “Introduction of Tarot readings into clinical psychotherapy: a naturalistic inquiry”.

Interestingly enough, and once again in accordance with Romanyshyn’s *imaginal* approach, my topic was about to *choose me* rather than the other way around! Referring to the *imaginal*, Romanyshyn emphasizes the role of this “third” dimension between the senses and the intellect as enabling an embodied way of being in the world within the context of complex mind reaching into the whole of nature. It was Henry Corbin who coined the *imaginal world* – *Mundus Imaginalis* or *mundus archetypus*, the archetypal world – as a distinct order of reality corresponding to a distinct mode of perception in contrast to purely *imaginary* as the unreal or just utopian. Yet, it is our cognitive function enriched with imagination that provides access to the imaginal world with a rigor of knowledge specified as knowing by analogy.

The method of analogy that mystics around the world have practiced for centuries defies the privileged role allotted to the conscious subject that observes the surrounding world of objects – from which he is forever detached – with the cool “scientific” gaze of an independent spectator so as to obtain a certain and indubitable knowledge, or *episteme*.

Mystics and poets (from whom Plato used to withhold academic status) historically played a *participatory*, embodied role in the relational network that forms an interdependent holistic fabric with the world thus overcoming the separation between subject and object. This dualistic split has been haunting us since the time of Descartes, confining us to what Corbin calls the “banal dualism” of matter versus spirit.

As for the “socialization” of consciousness, it pretends to resolve the dilemma by making, according to Corbin, a *fatal* choice: either myth or historical reality. Either facts or fiction! This book avoids the binary fatality of either/or choice: we will see in Chapter 3 that Tarot renders itself to explication in *both* mythical and real historic, cultural, terms.
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The sociological dimension is significant: Philip Wexler (1996, 2000, 2008), pointing out the current importance of religion and spirituality for socio-cultural life, ascribed the status of symbolic movement to sociology of education that aims to bring spirituality to secular, long-disenchanting and alienated, contexts so as to satisfy their hunger for meaning.

Wexler emphasizes an approach from within long-standing religious traditions and focuses specifically on Jewish mysticism. He calls for the “broad-scale revitalization...of the culture of modernity, a re-articulation of ancient religious traditions, and...the anti-institutional, but religiously-oriented movements of everyday life that we often referred to as instances and heralds of a ‘new age’” (Wexler, 2008, p. 9).

I share with Wexler his conviction that our present postmodern age calls for revision of the pre-modern traditions of theory, interpretation and understanding and especially in terms of following “the new age...tendency [by means of] opening the reservoir of the cultural resources of traditional, religious understanding...[in] mystical, experiential and spiritual aspects: from Hinduism, Tantra; from Islam, Sufism; from Christianity, mysticism; from Judaism, Kabbalah and Hasidism” (Wexler, 2008, p. 10).

This book will not only have added Tarot as a spiritual, both metaphysical and practical, system to Wexler’s list of multicultural traditions but will focus specifically on Tarot hermeneutic or on the art of, using the term from popular culture, Tarot readings. Etymologically, the Greek words hermeneuein and hermeneia for interpreting and interpretation are related to the mythic god Hermes, a messenger and mediator between gods and mortals, who crosses the thresholds and traverses the boundaries because he can “speak” and understand both “languages”, the divine and the human, even if they appear totally alien to each other.

As a practical method, Tarot hermeneutic allows us to relate to something essentially other but nevertheless understandable, knowable and, ultimately, known. The relation thus established between the generic “Self” and “Other” in our real practical life is significant and has both epistemological and ontological implications. The dimension of the foremost importance is however ethical, considering that we live in a time of the multiculturalism and globalization when different values appear incommensurable and continuously compete, conflict, and clash!

In our current global climate permeated by diverse beliefs, disparate values, and cultural conflicts, understanding ourselves and others and learning to share each other’s values is paramount for the survival of our species. This requires an expansion of our consciousness using all available means, including the knowledge of the symbolic language of Tarot pictures that are worth more, as the saying goes, than many thousands of words. Classical Russian author Ivan Turgenev pointed out that a picture shows at a glance what it can take dozens of pages of a book to expound. Without making grand metaphysical claims concerning Tarot, this book will focus on its practical side as comprising my empirical research data. Yet, important theoretical stepping stones will be laid down through chapter 1 to chapter 7 to ground the empirical data that will be presented in minute detail in chapter 8. Chapter 8